

**Remarks of Mayor Paul D. Fraim
Norfolk Consolidated Courts Groundbreaking
Thursday, January 12, 2012
4:00 PM**

Good afternoon. I'm pleased to be here today on such an important occasion for the City of Norfolk, so thank you all for joining me. In one way or another, everyone here this afternoon has a special connection to the Courthouse, and all of us recognize and appreciate the importance and necessity that has brought us to this moment.

I'm pleased to be joined on the platform by Vice Mayor Anthony Burfoot, Councilman Andy Protogyrou, and by Norfolk Circuit Court Chief Judge Junius P. Fulton. Councilman Tommy Smigiel, Councilwoman Angelia Williams and Councilman Barclay Winn are also here.

We're also joined by General District Court Chief Judge Bruce Wilcox, Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court Chief Judge Michele Atkins, Commonwealth's Attorney Greg Underwood, Circuit Court Clerk George Shaffer, Sheriff Bob McCabe and General District Court Clerk Tom Baldwin, Sharon McDonald, Commissioner of Revenue, and Tom Moss, Treasurer.

I would also note the presence of former Mayor and former Circuit Court Judge Joe Leafe. Joe has been an important part of this project from the beginning, so Joe, it's good to see you here today.

There's someone else here we want to acknowledge, someone who has personally been in charge of this project for nearly 10 years, and that is, of course, Stanley Stein. There's no telling how many meetings Stanley's attended, or how many plans he's reviewed, or how much time he's given to the project in that time. His steady hand can be seen in the end results and in the professional way the entire process and its numerous personalities have been managed. On behalf of all of us, Stanley, thank you for the great work you've done.

It truly has been a long road that has brought us to this moment, a moment I'm pretty sure some thought would never come. Today, we're here to break ground on the Norfolk Consolidated Courts Complex.

The truth is, a new courthouse has been a long time coming. According to city archives, the initial study for a new courts complex was issued in 1974 - nearly 40 years ago - and just over 10 years after the current courts buildings were occupied. An extraordinary gestation period.

The project reached a critical point in 2004 when City Council committed to replace the present aging and outdated court facilities and appropriated funds in the capital improvement budget to begin the design phase. Since then this Council, and ones before it, have appropriated funds in each of the last seven budgets, totaling over \$92 million dollars. An additional \$34 million dollars will be included in each of the next three budgets to complete the financing.

Along the way, stiff headwinds from the economic downturn made it necessary to delay start-up of construction. This was not something we wanted to do. But a combination of declining revenues and State cuts to local governments and schools – a situation, I might add, that continues to exert strong downward pressure on the budget - demanded that this project and others be pushed further out. That decision was made with the participation and support of the courts . . . and we appreciate your understanding of the reasons that compelled us to make that call, and your patience.

The building we're breaking ground on today was originally budgeted for \$141 million dollars. But the same economy that required us to delay construction helped shave \$20 million dollars off for the budget for a final cost of \$121 million dollars. Still a big number, but one that significantly helps the City's debt load.

Let me comment for just a minute on the project's design process. Courthouse operations have a lot of moving parts. There are courtrooms and judges' chambers, jury space, holding cells for prisoners, critical security needs for personnel and the public, records storage needs and space for the public to inspect records and transact other business.

Designing the interior was a complex job made more challenging by the fact that all the courts and clerks' offices will occupy the same building. Working with the judges, the clerks, the Sheriff's office, the Commonwealth's attorney, the Bar Association and others, the architects and staff drew plans that have met everyone's expectations.

The new courthouse is a major public investment, it's also an important civic building that will occupy a highly visible location. So its exterior design needs to contribute to the downtown landscape. And judging from the rendering here, I think we can all agree the building is going to be one we will be proud of, and that will serve the City and its citizens well for many years to come.

Today's groundbreaking is a landmark event, it is the culmination of years of planning and, to paraphrase a great Englishman, "while it is not the end, it is, perhaps, the beginning of the end."

So thanks to everyone who contributed to the project or who has been a part of it, including Fentress Architects and the contractor Archer, Western and Heery International.

I would now call on the Honorable Judge Junius Fulton for remarks. Judge Fulton will be followed by Councilman Andy Protogyrou.

On behalf of the City, thanks to everyone involved in the project for all you have done, and thank you to everyone for coming out to show your support and help us celebrate. Let's break ground!